

Thinking & Doing: Theological Methods in Asia
no regard for the welcome that may or may not be waiting. Assuming, however, that the day comes when some foreigners will be welcome, we as Christians need to give serious consideration to the style of Christian presence that is most appropriate.

From the very beginning we need to be clear on one major point, that the Christian mission in China is not synonymous with Christian foreign mission to China. There is a Christian church in China that survived against overwhelming odds and has even grown in membership. Contrary to popular western opinion, the evangelization of China does not depend upon the West. It is doubtful that foreign missionaries will ever be allowed to preach and solicit converts in present-day China. Evangelization in the traditional understanding of that term is a task for Chinese Christians, particularly those who have experienced the changes of the past thirty-five years. Only they are in a position to speak at this point in history. Christians in the West would do well to keep silent and listen and learn.

It is highly probable that any foreign Christian presence in China will have no relationship to missionaries at all in the traditional sense. Foreign Christians in China may have formal ecclesiastical ties, but their primary relationship will be to educational and medical institutions, government agencies, and cultural and research organizations. They will be in support positions rather than leadership positions. At the same time they will be pioneers entering a new field of service; a field that is different geographically, politically, socially, and philosophically. Most significant of all, however, is that they will have to experience what Kosuke Koyama calls "the crucified mind."⁵ In a very real sense they will find themselves doing theology in a situation not unlike that of Matteo Ricci in the sixteenth century.

personal witness!

~~For Ricci~~, the preparation for a Christian presence in China began with nine years of study in Europe, three years in law and six years in philosophy and theology. This was followed by four more years of study, teaching, and exposure to different cultures in Goa, a Portugese colony in India.⁶ Only after this initial preparation did he feel competent to begin his work in China. Upon arrival in China, Ricci assumed the role of a learner rather than a teacher. He began a serious study of the language, culture, history, and philosophy of China. Ricci had confidence in God's grace and refused to yield to the pressure of time for immediate results.⁷ For him it was more important to be accepted by the Chinese on their terms than it was to make converts. He did

not arrive in China with a fully developed program of action: "What distinguished his approach was rather an attitude of mind: respect for the people and culture of China, combined with unaffected humility which enabled him to adopt himself to his environment."⁸ In a very real sense, Ricci went through an apprenticeship "during which he became imbued with the Chinese point of view."⁹ For Ricci, it was necessary to crucify the European mind and take on the Chinese mind.

It is significant that Ricci's work did not really get underway until this crucifixion of the mind had taken place. Ricci understood that Christianity would be accepted in China only if it adapted itself to what was best in Chinese civilization. He also realized that this adaptation would have to begin in himself, for "to do otherwise was unpardonable egoism."¹⁰ As a result, Ricci avoided dependence upon the foreign mission structures in Macau as much as possible. The Eucharist was celebrated in private homes rather than in mission-built churches, and Ricci preferred to meet with the Chinese in small discussion groups following an evening meal. Ricci's presence was kept very low-key for he understood that he was the guest and the Chinese were his hosts. It was not his place to go where he was not wanted, nor was he about to assert himself in a way that might offend his Chinese hosts.

In time Ricci accomplished a feat that has eluded most foreign missionaries to China; he was fully accepted as a member of the scholar-gentry class. "At last the China mission had a man who could stand before the Chinese scholars, talk with them of scholarly things, and not be put to shame."¹¹ Not only was Ricci conversant in Chinese literature and philosophy, he was also able to read and write Chinese fluently. This latter qualification is most important, for the westerner in China who cannot read and write Chinese (no matter how fluent he or she is in the spoken language) is considered illiterate by the scholars and consequently will not be accepted by them. Unlike a number of foreign mission boards in a hurry to make converts, Ricci was willing to take the extra years to become fully literate in Chinese before he undertook his more overt mission activities.

Ricci's entire missionary career was oriented toward being accepted by the Chinese on their terms; he did not attempt to force himself upon the Chinese nor did he insist that they learn his language. His methods of mission have been summarized as follows:

1. study of language, culture and customs;
2. developing friendly contacts;
3. study of Chinese literary and philosophical classics;
4. wearing of Chinese styles in dress; and
5. alliance with progressive elements in Chinese scholarship.¹²

Following his arrival in Peking he developed this methodology further:

1. understanding the political system;
2. remained convinced on patience and prudence as a methodology;
3. saw the necessity of building up a network of reliable contacts; and
4. continued his study of the language.¹³

It is significant that language study forms both the first and last points in Ricci's methodology. To be accepted by others on their terms is the essence of the crucified mind, and language study is perhaps the most difficult, and most important, element in this process.

Xenon?
Ricci also exhibited a rare ability to distinguish between that which is cultural and particular to a given time and place, and that which is universal and common to all people in all situations. While there may be questions today concerning some of Ricci's categories, the fact remains that he was among the first missionaries to take culture seriously. Ricci was of the opinion that the Christian faith was universal, a viewpoint which reflected his sixteenth-century European background. At the same time, however, he understood that European culture was not universal, and in this he departed radically from the majority of Christian missionaries of his time. In the words of one observer: "He not only made an intelligent diagnosis of a totally unfamiliar condition, but he also, by implication, diagnosed his own condition and that of Western Christian civilization as a whole."¹⁴ In confronting an alien culture and adapting Christianity to that culture, Ricci came to see that his own culture was but one of many cultures to which Christianity had become adapted. Christianity had adapted itself to Roman law and Greek philosophy, and Ricci saw no reason why a similar adaptation could not be made to Chinese law and Confucian philosophy.¹⁵

This openness to the people and culture of China in no way weakened Ricci's Christian commitment. He was, after all, a missionary, and he did seek converts to the Christian faith. The Jesuit mission to China did result in baptisms and the planting of a Christian church. In all of this, however, there was the primary attitude of the crucified mind. It is this attitude,

and Ricci's application of it, that can serve as a model for doing theology in China. It was Ricci's attitude that earned him a hearing among the Chinese. He respected them and their culture, and in turn they respected him and the Christian message which he brought.

3. Doing Theology in China Today

Ricci and the early Jesuit missionaries pointed the way to a cultural rapprochement and understanding between peoples of the world. They knew that "the problem of rapprochement between East and West is chiefly a psychological or spiritual one."¹⁶ Furthermore, they were aware of the need for compromise. Syncretism, whereby one would absorb the other, and imperialism and colonialism, whereby one would forcibly subdue or exploit the other, have clearly been rejected by the Christian church in China. During the past thirty years the Christian church has come to an understanding through compromise with the realities of China today. The government, in turn, has also compromised and today the church is once again allowed to function openly. Any foreign Christian presence in China is going to have to exhibit this same degree of compromise. The mission work of Matteo Ricci serves as an indicator as to how a foreign Christian presence in China might be undertaken should the opportunity arise. Ricci, as a caring person and as a theologian, demonstrated how to do theology in the concrete--in China.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of a foreign Christian presence in China will be its effect, not upon the Chinese, but upon the Christians of the West. Ricci saw in the China of his day a new way of looking at his own culture and Christian faith. Christians from the West who go to China will have the opportunity for this same experience. Says one observer of the contemporary China scene: "I would propose that Christians would do well to test their life styles, social attitudes, and the social systems within which they live and witness by a broad and in-depth comparison with Chinese experience."¹⁷ One should add that western Christians should also test their theologies in light of Chinese experience. Much has been written in the West about the need for contextual theology. Perhaps the wisest thing that a western theologian in China could do would be simply to look and listen. Christians in China know more about contextual theology than Christians in the West will ever know, for they have had more than thirty years of isolation in which to

China: The Reluctant Exodus, by Phyllis Thompson, 1979, 189p.

China: The Reluctant Exodus is the story of an incredible group of missionaries, those of the China Inland Mission(CIM). But even more so, it is the story of a faithful, compassionate, and all wise God who delivers His people today just as He did in the Exodus of the Old Testament.

The story begins in Shanghai in 1948 when news begins to trickle in about Communist domination of certain areas along with executions carried out by Red Chinese soldiers at the decision of the People's Tribunal. Slowly but surely the Communists were marching through the land, and the question to CIM was, How long would it be until the entire country was taken? and, if so, What dangers, if any, would this pose to the mission? The only thing to do was watch, pray, and wait for news—especially from the outlying areas most affected at the outset.

News received was "bad news", and it grew worse and worse, however, it didn't seem that the Communists were interested in bothering the missionaries at all. Those being executed were Nationalists, who opposed the new regime. Would this "freedom" of religion remain? only time would tell. But the CIM'ers were tough, God had called them to China, and at this point He had not called them to leave. So, in December of 1948 the decision was made to stay on in China and suffer, if need be, with their Chinese brothers and sisters. There was no way they could hurt or stumble these ones they had given their lives for.

God, in His wisdom does all things well, and He already knew that pulling out would eventually be the thing that would protect these precious Chinese Christians. That time was not far off, because after the Communists had secured authority over the country they began their "house cleaning" duties. As one might expect, the Korean War, involving the U.S., did not make it look good for Americans in an Asian country. All the missionaries were labeled as spies and imperialists. So, under this new guise it became increasingly more dangerous for Chinese Christians to associate with the missionaries. Even the churches themselves were being confiscated by the authorities and worship services were being squelched. With great sorrow and heaviness of heart the CIM, in late 1950 (and with over 800 people in China), made the decision to withdraw.

page two

Withdrawal would not be easy, even though some were naive enough to think it could be done in four months. Funds had always been available for the normal mission load, but where in the world would enough money come from to evacuate over 800 people! God had His work cut out for Him.

Well, it wasn't four months, it was actually very close to four years before the last two CIM'ers exited at Hongkong— July 20, 1953 to be exact,^{so} the bulk of the book deals with, not the mission work, but with God's work in delivering every single one of those CIM'ers safe and sound.

The circumstances of all are obviously not given in a book of only 200 pages, but the author zeroes in like a telescope on the lives of those last few who were held the longest. It could be too, that these were the ones who kept accurate records of their experiences. Whatever the case we find a progression that takes us from late 1950 when over 800 were there to 1/1/51 when they had 637 left in their ranks to just three months later when the number had decreased to about 400. It was relatively easy in those early months to get out compared to the suffering and harrowing experiences that would follow for many of the others, especially for those in the farthest reaches.

As mentioned earlier, the experiences of miraculous deliverances are phenomenal! The suffering and sacrifice with full faith and confidence on the part of these courageous missionaries put the nominal Christianity of Americans in this country to shame. The long separations of parents and children, of husbands and wives, of friend from friend, with all kinds of imaginings about what might be happening to them and the wondering whether they'd ever see one another again, all adds up to a nightmarish existence to which our God adds a truly happy ending. "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream!" This became their motto for what God had done for them was almost too good to be true!

The CIM'ers were people of the Word. In every situation they turned to God's Word for comfort, guidance, strength, or whatever it was they needed. In every situation God made His promises sure. Praise be to God!

13 May 1957

Professor Moffett

The Dominicans

As Stephen Neill writes in his exhaustive work, A History of Christian Missions, the Order initiated by the far-sighted St. Dominic (1170-1221) was characterized by the following

His (Dominic's) Order was to be intellectually competent, devoted to the conversion of heretics particularly through the work of preaching, as its official title the 'Order of Preachers' indicates. (Neill, A History of Christian Missions, page 116-117)

According to Simon Tugwell (The Way of the Preacher), the Dominicans patterned themselves after the model epitomized by Jesus Christ as an indigent righteous preacher of the gospel. The Dominican perception of Christ (one which they earnestly and painstakingly strove to emulate) was in striking contrast to their Cistercian compatriots in Paris who existed in abject seclusion. The Dominicans were attracted to

...a picture of Christ, wandering round with nowhere to lay his head, not even so much as a foxhole to call his own, and sending some of his followers to travel round the towns and villages proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom, and relying on such hospitality as they might offered on the way! (Tugwell, The Way of the Preacher, page 13)

Indeed, the Dominicans were inspired by this humble portrayal of Christ the transient minister.

Essentially, the widely acknowledged objective of the Dominicans was captured by this anonymous rejoinder:

Our Order is known to have been founded specially for the sake of preaching and the salvation of souls. (Tugwell, The Way of the Preacher, page 22)

St. Dominic was concerned especially with the proliferation of learned preachers as he assumed that knowledge as well as religious fervor were complementary elements in the entire scheme of preaching. However, while he understood that education would enhance the preaching which his enthusiastic adherents spread far and wide. He took precautions so as not to diminish the significant role of the Holy Spirit. Consequently,

He took steps to see that the brethren could get the best theological education that was available, as we have seen. But he also prayed fervently that they would receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (Tugwell, The Way of the Preacher, page 34)

As significant as the very movement was in and of itself, the story of the man behind the Order is every bit as compelling. Francis C. Lehner has edited St. Dominic and records a vibrant account of this saint's unusual predestination. In many ways, Dominic resembles Jesus. First of all, there was a prediction regarding his birth. Secondly, he was inculcated within a strict religious setting. According to Lehner

...a boy named Dominic was born in this diocese in the town of Caleruega. Before his mother conceived him, she saw in a vision that she would bear in her womb a dog who, with a burning torch in his mouth and leaping from her womb, seemed to set the whole earth on fire.

Lehner continues

This was to signify that her child would be an eminent preacher who, by 'barking' sacred knowledge, would rouse to vigilance souls drowsy with sin, as well as scatter throughout the world the fire which the Lord Jesus Christ came to cast upon the earth.
(Lehner ed., St. Dominic, page 7)

The parallels which persist between Dominic and Christ abound as the former is enticed to commit a heinous sin

....it came about that a bold and wanton woman, an instrument of Satan, an obstacle to chastity, and a tinder-box of vices, came to him under the pretense of going to confession and said, 'I am overcome by a burning desire for a certain person....he perceived the very cause of danger and she admitted that it was for him that she was consumed.(Dominic went on to prevail virtually unscathed by such a tempting incident).

(Lehner ed., St. Dominic, page 48)

Another account which was recorded by Augusta T. Drane (The History of St. Dominic) portrays the exemplary witness that St. Dominic represented as a devout Christian. As Drane's incisive writing reveals, Dominic was indeed a man who had an intimate fellowship with God. The nature of his relationship with the Deity is evidenced by his fervent prayer life.

'Prayer had become so habitual with him,' says this writer, 'that whether at home or abroad, in the church or by the wayside, his heart was always united to God as to a centre wherein he abode with marvellous tranquillity. Like the three children who walked unharmed amid the flames of the fiery furnace, so did St. Dominic maintain the peace and quiet of his soul in the midst of every kind of outward distraction.

(Drane, The History of St. Dominic, p.295)

Essentially, a singular leader can infuse a movement with the spirit which motivates adherents who are loyal to a cause and willing to serve. St. Dominic is cast in a favorable light by all of his biographers and it seems that the man who spearheaded the Order of Preachers had few if any detractors. Perhaps the best means of determining the greatness of a leader is to view how that leader fares in comparison with other outstanding champions. As is befitting especially of a spiritual hero, the finest compliment that can be bestowed upon Dominic is that his actions are unfailingly Christ-like.

If one surveys some of history's eminent and charismatic champions of justice, one can conclude that the leader-as the chief exponent of the move-

ment-enjoyed the appeal of the masses and that the vision of the leader was actualized. Jesus Christ, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi constitute lofty standards against which any pretender to the throne will certainly be measured (and fall far short of the mark of excellence).

Jesus Christ was the controversial founder of Christianity. During his relatively abbreviated three-year ministry, he was to sow the seeds which affected the world for time immemorial when they germinated. As I mentioned earlier, it was Christ's humble demeanor as an indigent and itinerant preacher which became the earmark of the Order which bears Dominic's name. In spite of his apparently low station in life, Christ spoke vehemently against the hypocrisy which had sunk its claws into society. Most significantly, Christ travelled to the areas which desperately needed his saving grace.

While the impact which Jesus Christ had upon the world in the two millennia following his death and resurrection might be difficult to appreciate because its sheer magnitude is overwhelming, the efforts of Gandhi and Dr. King give a better perspective against which to ascertain Dominic's staggering and pervasive influence. While Gandhi was able to throw a monkey wrench of sorts into the smooth mechanism of British colonial expansion, one thing is certain. Although he was able through non-violent direct confrontation to arrest the cancerous spread of British domination in India, nevertheless, his efforts of the previous century are now legendary rather than reality for present day India. When he perished so did the movement.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. orchestrated the Birmingham boycotts and freedom marches in the 1950's and '60's so as to assert the rights of black people in the United States as full-fledged citizens. The Voting Rights Act

guarantees that a Mayor like Washington can get elected in Chi ago or an Andrew Young can get elected in Atlanta. However, much of Martin Luther King stood for was effectively vanquished when he was cut down by an assasain's bullet on April 4, 1968. The non-violent protests which he personally endorsed were replaced by riots in Watts and Chicago and Black Panther rallies across the nation. Thus, Dr. King's consideraole efforts to emulate Christ and Gandhi by virtue of martyrdom and non-violent resistance have also been diminished over time as troubled economic conditions have cast their threatening pall over our country's fiscal atmosphere.

King is still a hero - but you are not. Don't let the spirit of King die. Be realistic.

St. Dominic occupies a place in history which is superior to either Gandhi or King because the fruits of his painstaking labor are still being harvested in the twentieth century-750 years after his death. St. Dominic is revered because he imbued the Order of the Dominicans with his unwavering conviction to Christ. Dominic left his indelible imprint on an order which was instrumental in being active in the world for Christ.

While the Benedictines and Cistercians were passive but nonetheless unassailable models of ascetism, Dominic strove to be in the world but not of the world. Thus, his Order was instrumental in the disseminating of the Christian message.

In conclusion, the Dominicans reflected the Christ-like radiance of their founder. Surely the world has not encountered a saint who was superior to Dominic. Thus, it was Dominic's sterling example which inspired Francis of Camerino and William the Englishman who

In 1333....won a notable success with the conversion of the Alan prince of Vospro in the Crimea...

(Neill, A History of Christian Missions, page 130)

*Professor Poffett- I apologize for the length of my paper. However, last week my father was very ill and was hospitalized for nearly a week. My running home to New York City on such short notice coupled with the pressures of havin to submit 4 papers of considerable length in three days contributed to my dem-se. Please take these factors into consideration when you read my paper.

Sincerely, *Samuel Wath...*

THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH:
GROWTH IN A CHANGING SOCIETY
Arthur L. Tuggy

Scott R. Janney
Dr. Samuel H. Moffett
EC41 Asian Christianity
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THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH: GROWTH IN A CHANGING SOCIETY draws upon a wealth of historical and sociological research. It is clear that Arthur Tuggy has a firm grasp on the history of the Philippines.

This book traces the history of these islands as far back as the sources will allow. It starts with a short introduction to Philippine geography and pre-history, and then deals with the expansion of the Roman Catholic Church. Spanish colonial power and the Catholic Church worked hand in hand to transform the Philippines both politically and spiritually. Mr. Tuggy presents a realistic treatment of this era. He does not present a hagiography of the monks, nor does he damn them as Western imperialists. He points to negative and positive aspects of this first Christian mission to the Philippines.

The section on Spanish rule is followed by an account of the Philippine revolution, America's acquisition of the Philippines and their eventual independence in 1945. He uses the New Testament concept of KAIROS to explain the correlation between political and spiritual movements in the islands.

A thorough study of Church Growth is presented. This is aided by his use of five graphs which demonstrate trends in Church Growth. He shows particular interest in the Methodist, American Baptist and Iglesia ni Cristo Churches.

He concludes his study with a good treatment of the modern sociology of the Philippines and a proposal for a method to be used in further Church Growth. In his examination of Philippine society, Mr. Tuggy finds that the family unit, with its

bilateral extensions, is the primary unit of that society. Early in the book, he conjectures that it has always been so. In the conclusion, his proposal is that evangelism should take place along family lines. He tests this proposal with certain criteria, and presents a case study of how this method works.

Over all, this is a well unified book that makes great use of sociological insight. The historical facts are treated fairly, and he makes efforts to guard against his own prejudices.

My main criticism is that his theology does not come up to par with his sociology. The book often supplies Church Growth catchwords rather than dealing creatively with the situation. An example of this is his use of the labels "conversion growth" and "transfer growth." This tends to avoid some very serious theological questions. I would like to ask Mr Tuggy two questions: 1) Are the Roman Catholics in the Philippines real Christians? If so, 2) can a person's change from Roman Catholicism legitimately be labeled "conversion growth?"

Book Report
EC 41

American Missionaries and Hinduism
A Study of Contacts from 1813-1910
by Sushil Mashava.

Michael Glaser
April 25th, 1983

Professor S.M. Pathak of Ranchi University, Bihar covers one hundred years of missionary activity among the Indian people. Church history being the scholar's speciality, the account adequately discusses both the Indian and Western traditions. Pathak recorded well over two hundred pages covering the dramatic changes within Indian society between 1813-1910. This work on the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century serves an indispensable role for the student of Indian church history.

The book is divided into two sections. First, the period between 1813-1870; the second between 1870-1910. The objective of the first section is intended to inform the reader of missionary contributions to the fields of medicine, social work and education. Furthermore, the interests and motives behind the activities are presented. The second section is an analysis of the American missionary attitude toward the Hindu people and tradition. The author's central theme deals with the dialectical exchange and reform between the Christians and the Hindus. Pathak maintains that in this capacity missionaries have played an essential role in the cultural growth between the two nations.

The writer's foremost point, it seems to me, is the view that the shift from the emphasis upon personal salvation to that of social transformation was the key to missionary success in India. Since Liberal Theology flourished during the period, the missionaries' attitude began empathizing more with the Hindu orientation and consequently the Hindu perspective on Christianity became more open.

As the barrier between the two religions was softening a mutual realization of common goals was acknowledged. Although a small contingent of "conservative", intolerant Christians retained a less flexible approach, the author emphasizes the positive tolerant spirit of the more liberal milieu .

Dr Pathak's work is an important text covering an essential period of transition in India. Unfortunately, the author has depended extensively on Western Church perspective and writings. Clearly, he has not incorporated either the Hindu reaction to Christian expansion nor that of the Indian Church leaders. This is particularly apparent in chapter nine. Another questionable factor in Pathak's analysis is his confusion on the issue of personal salvation versus social renovation. Although the missionaries' emphasis changed during the nineteenth century, church records particularly the Wesleyan and Congregationalists reveal that the "personal salvation" remained the foremost goal. Finally, the author failed to deal with a majority of American missionary societies working in India during this period. This mistake may be the most problematic in that much is lost when overemphasizing the visible missionary conglomerates while overlooking the mass of effective smaller bodies.

THE INCARNATION OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IN ALASKA

EC 41 CONTEMPORARY EAST ASIAN CHRISTIANITY

DR. SAMUEL MOFFETT

GEORGE LIACOPULOS

MAY 9, 1990

INTRODUCTION

Following the discovery of Alaska in 1741 by Commodore Vitius Bering and Captain Alexei Chirikov, a new period of Russian colonization and commerce was inaugurated. Several of the Aleutian islands were settled and a lucrative supply of sea-otter, fox, seal, and sea cow was rapidly exploited by Russian merchants representing various trading companies.¹ By 1793, the colonies had grown to such an extent that Grigor Shelikov, owner of the Russian-American Company, asked the Holy Synod of Russia to send monks from the mainland ~~who~~ ^{to} ~~could~~ oversee the spiritual and ethical needs of the settlers, and also "enlighten the heathen." As a result, eight monks arrived in 1794, hence beginning the official Christianization of the Alaskan people and a new era in Orthodox mission history.

*good material
to be used*

This study will attempt to assess the extent to which the missiological goals and practices of the Alaskan missionaries coincided with the various missionary ideals promoted by Orthodox Christian Tradition. Special attention will be focused on the earlier phase of the mission (1794 - 1867) and on the evangelistic work of Fr. John Veniaminov (later Bishop Innocent) as it pertains to the following aspects of the Alaskan mission: baptismal practices, Church governance and leadership, financial support, language usage and translations, educational methods, and a more concentrated analysis of the manner in which attempts were made to establish points of contact between Orthodox theology and Alaskan naturalistic religions. In other words, an attempt will be made to ascertain the extent to which Orthodox Christianity was contextualized and incarnated within the Alaskan religio-cultural context.

MISSIOLOGICAL IDEALS

Orthodox theologians insist that all genuine missionary endeavors must be motivated by a love for God, a love for humankind, and by a conviction of inner necessity as described by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 9: 16).² In addition, the ultimate aim of mission must be the "glory of God" since all conversions are accomplished by God and also manifest His glory and loving power.³ The immediate aims of mission include the conversion of those outside the Church and their consequent incorporation into the community of the "ekklesia." New believers must participate in the life of Christ by sharing in the sacramental, prayer, and teaching life of the Church.⁴ Such aims require the missionaries to comprehend the local culture, learn the vernacular, create written texts if these are not already available, ordain a "native" clergy, establish an autonomous Church within a reasonable time period, and empower the young Church to establish its own spirituality and mission.⁵ While James Stamoolis is eager to emphasize Orthodoxy's desire to "plant" churches in new lands rather than create extensions of older "mother Churches", Ion Bria argues for a continuity between older and younger Churches in order to preserve the universal unity of world Orthodox Christianity.⁶ It appears that both of these approaches should be held in a constant, healthy tension, in order for the Church to be faithful to her missiological and ecumenical nature..

Stamoolis reiterates that the Orthodox "incarnational" approach necessitates "the translation, the very embodiment of God's truth in the language and culture of a people."⁷ Since, "God became man so that we might become gods" according to St. Athanasios, the "truth of God must assume a form in which the message of salvation can be communicated."⁸ Michael Oleksa adds that incarnating these cultural elements essentially means to "baptize them into the Church."⁹ Moreover, while Hendrik Kraemer considers the Christian witness of the missionary to be the

only true point of contact between Christianity and people of other religions, the Orthodox also stress the importance of the missionary by insisting that he or she "lives with the people, will become one of them, and will become flesh from their flesh."¹⁰

In addition to the term "incarnation", Lesslie Newbigin's preference for the term "contextualization" will also be espoused since it "suggests the placing of the Gospel in the total context of a culture at a particular moment, a moment that is shaped by the past and looks to the future."¹¹ Newbigin also notes that the concept of "indigenization" is no longer appropriate, since it "tends to relate the Christian message to the traditional cultural forms - forms that belonged to the past and from which young people were turning away under the pervasive influence of modernization."¹² Moreover, "adaptation" will not be utilized to describe the contextualization process since "it implies that what the missionary brought with him was the pure Gospel, which had to be adapted to the receptor culture."¹³ Such a notion tends to obscure the fact that the Gospel message delivered by the missionaries has already been shaped by his or her own culture.

BAPTISMAL PRACTICES AND CHURCH GROWTH

Gregory Shelikov and other Russian merchants had evangelized and even baptized some of the Alaskans they encountered during the first period of colonization.¹⁴ By April of 1793, Shelikov reported that many Alaskans were requesting baptism and that the merchants were no longer capable of overseeing the spiritual needs of the Alaskans and of the Russian settlers. The monks who arrived the following year report that within a period of one year they had baptized 6,740 Aleuts and that very little effort was needed in encouraging them to accept baptism. Veniaminov contends that some of these converts had been

previously prepared by certain Christ-centered merchants and that they genuinely sought to become Christians. Others, however, were baptized without proper catechism and had a negligible understanding of their new faith. Veniaminov reports that "Though they came to believe and prayed to God before my arrival (1824), they scarcely knew in whom they believed or to whom they prayed."¹⁵

The majority of these early converts, however, were probably motivated by non-theological reasons. For instance, many of the early Russian traders mistreated their Alaskan neighbors and coerced them into becoming Christians for reasons that were economically expedient. The Russians quickly learned that baptized Aleuts remained loyal to their godfathers and proved to be obedient workers. As a result, the merchants inaugurated a kind of competition whereby they attempted to baptize as many loyal godchildren as possible in an effort to assemble a work force which could amass greater profits.¹⁶ The fact that Alaskan chieftains and elders did not oppose baptism, but rather encouraged it; coupled with Kraemer's observation that adherents of naturalistic religions tend to have a limited understanding of conversion, also helps to explain the rapidity with which early baptisms were accomplished.

The Thlingit tribe of the Sitka region, however, represents a group which proved much more reluctant to accept baptism. They have been described as a war-like tribe which was in continuous conflict with Russian settlements and which refused to accept Christianity because of the manner in which the Russians exploited and maltreated the Aleuts. They equated Christianity with a loss of personal and communal freedom.¹⁷ Paul Garrett portrays this tribe as being shamanistic, while believing in a Creator (named "E1" like the Hebrew God) who is not in control of the world's activities. Moreover, the Thlingits believed that "E1" loves his people but expresses his anger toward them by sending diseases and other misfortunes.

Finally, the Thlingits believed that "Ei" has a son of unknown origin who is more loving than his father and who intercedes for the people.¹⁸

Veniaminov hoped to capitalize on some of the points of contact which he observed between Christianity and the Thlingit religion, but later admitted that Thlingit conversions would have been difficult to accomplish had not Divine Providence interceded in a most unexpected way. Veniaminov's visits to the Thlingits had been delayed for a variety of reasons, but official contacts became a necessity when a small-pox epidemic killed several Thlingits but failed to affect the Christian villagers because of vaccinations which they had received. The Thlingits eventually agreed to trust Veniaminov, received vaccinations, and were spared from the epidemic. Had Veniaminov visited them prior to the epidemic, they would have undoubtedly blamed him for the resultant deaths of their people and perhaps would have never accepted Christianity.¹⁹

By 1837, a trust relationship had been established and Veniaminov invited the Thlingits to attend and observe an outdoor Liturgy which he celebrated. 1500 people attended and remained afterwards to ask questions and to listen to Veniaminov as he preached the message of the Gospel. The witness of the Liturgy convinced many to request baptism. It is interesting to note, however, that Fr. John insisted upon obtaining permission from chieftains and relatives before baptizing Thlingits.²⁰

Veniaminov's encounter with the Alaskans of the Fort Alexander region also reveals the challenges and opportunities for creativity experienced by the early missionaries. Veniaminov required these seekers to participate in a period of catechetical preparation before being baptized. At the baptism itself, performed in a nearby river, the converts were required to renounce Satan and accept Christ. In addition, each person was given back his or her old clothing and was not allowed to receive a new white shirt from the godparents, as is

traditional in Orthodox baptismal practices. This was done in response to those who would travel from place to place and be baptized by a different priest with the hopes of obtaining a new shirt each time. Veniaminov hoped to encourage Aleuts to seek baptism out of genuine love for Christ and not for material gain. Lay leaders were instructed to enforce these baptismal guidelines.²¹ Finally, Garrett provides us with an excerpt from Veniaminov's journal which reveals that many subsequent baptisms were facilitated by the witness of those first converts baptized by Fr. John.²²

The Koryaks, on the other hand, proved to be an insurmountable challenge to missionary efforts and demonstrate how similar world-views can be utilized by different tribes to either facilitate or impede conversion to Christianity. Unlike the early Aleuts of Kodiak Island, the Koryaks refused to become Christians because of the manner in which the Cossacks had treated them and, therefore, did not allow themselves to feel coerced. When Bishop Innocent (formerly Fr. John Veniaminov) stressed the necessity of baptism for salvation, they claimed that God never gave them the desire to be baptized and that they preferred to die in the faith of their ancestors. When Innocent presented them with the reality of hell for those who willingly refuse baptism, their response was: "What can we do? That is where our ancestors are you know." The Koryaks did agree, however, not to prevent other Koryaks from being baptized if they so desired.²³

This tribe also feared that by getting baptized they would anger their god and not be granted the whales and fish that other disobedient tribes were prevented from catching. Veniaminov's attempt to explain the fish shortage in terms of irresponsible and excessive fishing and hunting practices proved unconvincing since the Koryaks were predisposed to equate baptism (disobedience) with poverty.²⁴

Overall, a complex mixture of theological and non-theological factors can be

cited for the growth, stabilization, or decline of the mission in particular regions, during certain time periods. For instance, the early high baptism rate can be attributed to the evangelical efforts of certain merchants and to the unethical and exploitative practices of others. In 1799, Bishop Ioasaph and two other monks were lost at sea, Fr. Juvenaly was killed by a tribe of Alaskans, and a fifth monk suffered from mental stress. As a result, the missionaries were inadequately staffed to handle ever-increasing spiritual needs since replacements were unavailable. Furthermore, Alaska did not have a bishop for 40 years. Such shortages resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of baptisms celebrated after 1799. In addition, the Russian-American Company, which was commissioned by the czar to oversee the economic and political needs of the colonies, began to restrict missionary activities once the monks began to protest the Company's unethical practices. This situation also served to strengthen the mission, however, since Aleuts began to view the missionaries, and especially the monk Herman, as friends and advocates who could be trusted.²⁵ Great distances, poor transportation, and oppressive weather conditions, on the other hand, tended to counterpoise the extent to which the Faith could be spread.

According to Veniaminov, in 1840 there were 10,313 Christians in Alaska (706 Russians, 1,295 Creoles, and 8,312 Americans).²⁶ By 1860, there were 12,028 believers (784 Russians; 1,676 Creoles; 4,392 Aleuts; 937 Kenaitze; 456 Chugach; 2,725 Eskimos; 447 Thlingits; and 611 others). Whereas in 1840 the mission had four churches and four priests; by 1867 it contained nine churches, nine priests, two deacons, one bishop, and 35 chapels.²⁷ Much of this later growth spurt can be attributed to the highly competent leadership of Bishop Innocent, Alaska's first hierarch. After 1867, however, when Alaska had been sold to the U.S. and the Russian-American Company had gone bankrupt, the Christian presence declined somewhat. A shortage of priests and money along with

periods of intermittent episcopal leadership were largely responsible for this setback.²⁸ By 1902, the Alaskan Church had seventeen priests, one deacon, twelve readers, 11,758 members, 45 Church schools, and five orphanages. The Church's composition had also changed by including 87 Russians; 2,257 Creoles; 2,147 Thlingits; 2,406 Aleuts; 4,839 Eskimos; and 22 others.²⁹

CHURCH GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Since the reign of Peter the Great in the early 18th century, the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church had been abolished and the Church had become a Department of State that was represented by a Synod of Bishops which was supervised by an Ober-procurator appointed by the czar. Hence, the Church was not allowed to function autonomously since all major decisions required government approval. As a result, because the Alaskan colonies were understood to be an extension of the Russian State, the missionaries were obligated to assume a similar posture of dependency ^{vis-a-vis} ~~viz-a-viz~~ the Russian-American Company, which represented the State. This relationship can be illustrated by the manner in which the missionaries followed the Russian-American Company into Alaska and, in turn, established churches where the Company had already founded settlements, forts, or trading posts. The Company also provided protection, transportation, and financial support.³⁰ It was not until later that missionaries and Alaskans evangelized the interior of the region in a more independent fashion.

Such advantages were oftentimes neutralized, however, by the Company's unwillingness to allow Church leaders to administer ecclesiastical matters autonomously. For instance, after Bishop Ioasaph's death in 1799, no other bishop was appointed until Innocent became bishop of Alaska in 1840. ^{Bishop Gregory Afonsky} does not indicate why the Church was rendered bishopless for such a long period,

but one can surmise that the Company may have opposed such an appointment in order to insure the continuation of its unethical practices in an unchallenged manner. In addition, monks who protested Company policies were oftentimes prevented from fulfilling their ministries (ie. celebrating the Liturgy, visiting distant communities, etc.). After 1867, the Church enjoyed much more autonomy because of Alaska's sale to the U.S., and because the Russian-American Company had gone bankrupt. After the Great Sobor of 1917 in Moscow and the Russian Revolution of that same year, the Alaskan Church attained even greater autonomy, although at the loss of much needed funds which the Communist-controlled Church was no longer capable of providing.³¹

The Russian missionaries were assisted in accomplishing their goal of ordaining "native" clergy by various societal factors. Iakov Netsvetov was an Aleut whose priestly talents were readily recognized by the missionaries, thus resulting in his ordination in 1828. Netsvetov is recognized as the "Apostle to the Alaskan Eskimo" and is considered instrumental in the baptism of 1,320 persons.³² While Russia offered Russian priests favorable salaries and good pensions to serve in Alaska, few responded to the offer because of the hardships of Alaskan life. Even Veniaminov initially refused to serve in Alaska because he feared for his family's safety. After the sale of Russia to the U.S., Russian priests were suspected of subversive behavior against the U.S. government, hence, necessitating the Church to remain true to its goal of ordaining Alaskans.³³ For instance, in 1979 Alaska had 22 priests - 16 of them were Alaskans. Such an incarnational success story, however, is clouded by the fact that at least up to 1917, Alaska has not had an Alaskan bishop. One can only speculate about the nature and direction of Church growth after 1867 if Innocent had begun to train an Alaskan priest who could have succeeded him as bishop.

Many of the previously-cited conditions (harsh climate, poor transportation,

shortage of priests, sale of Alaska, lack of funding, etc.) also helped the Church to utilize lay leadership to an extent seldom actualized in Orthodox Church history. For instance, Oleksa claims that for several decades, 90% of the congregations gathered for worship without priests and were led by lay leaders who fulfilled many ecclesiastical needs (preaching, song leading, visitation, etc.)³⁴ Veniaminov reports that lay leaders were even entrusted with particles of Pre-Sanctified Communion which they were allowed to prepare³⁵ for distribution, upon following very carefully specified instructions.

The need for lay leadership also stemmed from the mobile nature of many Alaskan tribes. There simply were not enough priests to accompany hunters and fishermen during their prolonged journeys. Dedicated lay leaders would, therefore, assume responsibility for the spiritual needs of their nomadic neighbors.³⁶ Other lay people were serving as interpreters for the missionaries and were especially instrumental in producing several biblical and liturgical translations which could be disseminated. Oleksa argues that, in fact, by 1867, Aleuts were more in control of their society than were the Russians. Aleuts had assumed leadership in sailing, writing books, keeping accounts, engraving maps, exploring, and populating cities.³⁷

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

An analysis of the young Church's ability to become self-supporting yields favorable and unfavorable conclusions. The previously-described Church/State relationship transported from Russia and imposed upon the Alaskan Church proved to be a mixed blessing. In Russia the State was responsible for funding schools, orphanages, churches, monasteries, priests' salaries, and other related institutions. The 1799 and 1821 Charters of Monopoly granted to the Russian-American Company required it to fulfill these same obligations.³⁸ In the early

years of the mission, such assistance was undependable, but later became more constant and reliable. The Company built several churches, chapels, schools, orphanages, the seminary in Sitka, and also provided funds for clergy salaries, missionary travel expenses, and for the printing of translations.³⁹

Such assistance was certainly beneficial to the mission, but it created an unbalanced dependency relationship which rendered the Church incapable of adequately responding to forthcoming financial crises. For instance, a loss of funding from the Russian-American Company in 1863 prodded the Church towards becoming more self-supporting, but also resulted in hardships. In 1870, the State Council of Russia gave the Holy Synod funds which were to be used to support Alaskan churches and priests. While this gave the Church (in Russia) more financial control, the funds were still being provided by an outside source (the State) and were not being generated from or managed within Alaska.⁴⁰ The Russian Revolution of 1917 forced Alaska (now part of the U.S. diocese) to become autonomous from the Russian State and Church, but also resulted in financial difficulties since the young Church had become accustomed to depend upon outside sources of revenue.

The Alaskans, however, were willing and capable of supporting their churches, at least to some extent, and perhaps fully if granted the opportunity. State and Church policies restricted Alaskan contributions. For instance, the Russian-American Company would not allow Veniaminov to receive money from the people of Unalaska for unspecified reasons which may, however, be related to the Company's desire to have exclusive control over missionary activities.⁴¹ Veniaminov, himself, instructed other missionaries not to receive contributions from newly-converted believers so that they would not think that God demands offerings as propitiatory sacrifices. Later on, gifts could be received from them if the use of the money for the Church was explained to them.⁴² Bishop

Ioasaph's report of 1797 also advised that Aleut contributions be delayed until the converts had become more fully integrated into the life of the Church.

Despite these restrictions, extant materials indicate that the Alaskans offered much support to their Church and its ministries. For instance, Garrett reports that the Russians and Alaskans of Unalaska raised 885 rubles (with permission from the Company) in order to help the Veniaminov family establish itself.⁴³ Afonsky notes that the people provided funds for the maintenance of churches by making private donations. Furthermore, Veniaminov had informed his bishop in Russia that the Unalaska Church had been able to save some money from excessive income which he hoped to utilize for philanthropic purposes. Permission was granted to improve the school, build a six-bed hospital staffed by a paramedic, and to establish a small orphanage. Veniaminov's request suggests that he was receiving income from sources other than the Russian-American Company.⁴⁴ Finally, Oleksa reiterates that funds for the translation and publishing of Mark, Luke, John, and Acts were provided by the Aleuts themselves.⁴⁵

LANGUAGE USAGE AND TRANSLATIONS

The early monks were not overly successful in preaching the Gospel and in liturgizing in the vernacular. Official Church policy required all missionaries to learn the American dialects as quickly as possible. However, there is an extant excerpt which indicates that in 1805 the Russian overseer had chastised the monks for still not knowing the American languages.⁴⁶ St. Herman, who expressed indefatigable love towards the Aleuts during his 37 year ministry, failed to become fluent in the local dialect. Even Veniaminov, who learned several dialects, tended to use an interpreter during his preaching because he doubted his own linguistic abilities. The conversion of several Alaskans, who

later became priests and lay leaders, counteracted these early difficulties, by providing receptor peoples with evangelists who spoke the dialects fluently and who thoroughly understood the world-view of their fellow Alaskans.

The Russians, however, were very successful in fulfilling their goal of providing reliable translations. The shortage of priests and difficult travel conditions dictated that all communities, and especially distant ones, be supplied with written materials that could be read and discussed in the absence of a priest. The Russians, however, were self-motivated. For instance, in 1841 the Synod sent Bishop Innocent a letter which advised him to "tell his priests that they could not be considered to have done their duty until they had translated at least one of the Gospels into a native dialect and taught at least 50 people to read it."⁴⁷

By 1807, Fr. Gideon had prepared the first Aleut alphabet and had translated the Lord's Prayer.⁴⁸ Twenty years later, Veniaminov and John Pankov had written and translated the "Full Catechism" into Aleut and then began to read and explain it as they travelled from village to village. This text is very comprehensive and well organized, however, it appears to be designed for mature Christians and shows very little effort to use Alaskan thought forms, beliefs, ideas, or customs to proclaim or explain Christianity. In fact, there are several sections which reveal a marked Roman Catholic influence, probably from some of the reading materials shipped to Veniaminov from Russia.

In addition, by 1830 Veniaminov had created his own alphabet for the Aleut language and he also began to preach in Aleut. In 1833 Aleut was used in worship, along with Russian and Church Slavonic, which had been the only two liturgical languages up to that time. In 1832, he translated the Gospel of Matthew and by 1834 an Aleut Lexicon of 1200 words and a grammar had been composed.⁴⁹ Afonsky adds that by 1840 Veniaminov had translated Luke, Acts, sermons on the Christian

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life, and a Bible history book.

Records indicate that each translation was slowly and carefully produced and also proofread by several Aleuts. In fact, Veniaminov would only send his translations to Russia for publication if they were accompanied by petitions signed by Aleuts who attested to their accuracy.⁵¹ Finally, Veniaminov's farewell letter to the people of Sitka reveals a great deal about his understanding of the translation process. In this letter he explains that "there may be errors and some words may be vague since it is difficult to translate Russian into Aleut." He, therefore, offered the following counsel: "don't become too attached to the words, but try to grasp the full meaning and spirit of the Divine Word. My brethren: Read. Hearken. Believe and put into practice the things you read. Become wise and be saved."⁵²

EDUCATION

The Orthodox mission was also entrusted by the imperial Government with responsibility for educating Alaskan converts. The success of these schools is indicated by the fact that Alaska's literacy rate was eventually much higher than that of mainland Russia and also by the fact that children educated in mission schools and Church schools (Sunday Schools) were responsible for much of the evangelism and Church leadership exercised by the believers of later generations.

Available materials indicate that children received a balanced education which enabled them to assume leadership in various occupations. The lower grades at the Sitka school, for instance, were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion. A six-year program of advanced studies included the following subjects: "Alaskan Native languages, Russian, English, Latin, geography, navigation, trigonometry, medicine, history, astronomy, and theology."⁵³

Reports reveal that native languages were taught at other schools as well, therefore, demonstrating that the missionaries were justified in priding themselves for preserving traditional languages and customs. Unfortunately many of these efforts were undone by missionaries of other Christian traditions and by U.S. laws which imposed English, and only English, upon American Indians, Eskimos, and Alaskans. ^{after 1867} A seminary was also founded in Sitka in 1845, but then transferred to Yakutsk thirteen years later. ⁵⁴ In 1979, St. Herman's Seminary was founded in Alaska and is currently attended by several "native" Alaskans.

THEOLOGICAL POINTS OF CONTACT

This section of the paper will address the various ways in which Orthodox missionaries attempted to contextualize and incarnate Orthodox Christianity within the Alaskan religio-cultural context. The presentation of these methodologies must be prefaced by an Orthodox understanding of the goal to be desired whenever Christianity encounters and attempts to convert adherents of other truth systems. Hendrik Kraemer, who has written extensively about these dynamics, will provide a starting point for this exposition.

Kraemer contends that Christianity is not the fulfillment of non-Christian religions and that only the terms "conversion" and "regeneration" should be employed to delineate the Christianization of the non-believers which occurs. ⁵⁵ Orthodoxy also emphasizes the necessity of "conversion" or "metanoia", but also insists that Christianity is a fulfillment of many other religious systems, though not in an absolute manner. Orthodoxy would agree with Kraemer that many of the commonalities shared by religious systems result from sinfully motivated human desires and needs which produce similar religious beliefs and ideals. While Kraemer would employ this reality to demonstrate the discontinuity between the pure Gospel message and sinfully motivated human-made religions in general;

the Orthodox would agree, but also add that all people are created in the image and likeness of God and are capable of living God-like lives to varying extents, depending upon a plethora of factors. Romans 1-2, the Cosmic Christ of Colossians, Justin Martyr's exposition of the "spermatikos logos," and the "image and likeness of God" theology of Genesis are all cited as a counterbalance to Kraemer's over-emphasis of the sinful dimension of human existence.

Barth's claim that there is no point of contact between Christianity and others, is therefore, suspect from an Orthodox perspective.⁵⁶ Orthodoxy is willing to acknowledge other belief systems as providing a "praeparatio evangelica" for the Gospel. For instance, since Christianity fulfilled Judaism and Hellenic philosophy, likewise the Orthodox insist that other traditions present elements which can facilitate the conversion process. However, obstructive elements are also readily acknowledged and combatted whenever necessary. For instance, Veniaminov instructed his priests to gently but firmly urge wealthy Alaskans to relinquish their adherence to polygamy. The process of fulfillment is certainly fraught with many difficulties and challenges, but it is biblically sound from an Orthodox missiological perspective.

While Veniaminov and other Orthodox thinkers have uttered statements which agree with Barth's claim that, "it is exclusively God's grace and no human contribution that brings about conversion,"⁵⁷ such Orthodox statements, couched in pastoral and devotional contexts, fail to express the fulness of the Church's teaching. Gregory Palamas recapitulated the entire Patristic tradition when he stressed the absolute necessity and uniqueness of God's initiative, sustenance, guidance, and power to complete all good works, including conversion. However, he also affirmed the reality of synergy (a dynamic whereby people, because of their free will, are capable of cooperating with and even promoting the works of God by offering their God-given talents to Him in Christian service). People play

a decisive role in God's plan of salvation, but, of course, God's will can ultimately override and overcome any human attempts, or even sub-conscious tendencies, to thwart the power of God's salvific grace.

Kraemer raises a helpful insight when he explains that people from a naturalistic religious system may not really understand what conversion is because of their relativistic world-view.⁵⁸ Such evangelistic encounters serve to bolster his contention that non-Christians need to make a radical break from their past in order to become true Christians. Such a claim, however, is unrealistic, since those who are being evangelized cannot possibly effect the kind of break which he advocates. Years of life experience will continue to exert some kind of influence. Furthermore, the "discontinuity" position appears to defy the essence of the incarnation - God loved us so much that he became one of us and was willing to meet us in our limited humanity.

Kraemer also posits that Christians should not amalgamate other elements, but use them to tell and declare the Good News in a comprehensible way. Missionaries should not try to relate Christianity to other thought forms, but rather employ the thought forms to express Christianity.⁵⁹ This is a noble endeavor, but again, will unavoidably result in varying degrees of amalgamation. Learning by association is a prominent method used by all people and will certainly be utilized by both evangelists and converts as the Gospel message and Church communities become contextualized.

Despite Kraemer's aversion to points of contact between Christianity and other belief systems, he does consider Christ-like missionaries who encounter people of other faiths to be the one real point of contact. Such individuals, by their personal example and witness, can directly impact upon others and reveal the Gospel message.⁶⁰ Forthcoming accounts of Orthodox missionary ideals and practices will also vehemently emphasize the importance of the missionary

example as a loving witness to Christ. Orthodoxy, however, does not consider this to be the only point of genuine contact.

Oleksa claims that we have "virtually no record of the actual content of the preaching of the Valaam monks" by which an assessment can be made of how they related the Gospel to Alaskan religions.⁶¹ Nonetheless, portions of this content can perhaps be reconstructed by studying parallels between the two truth systems and by studying the evangelistic methodologies employed by Veniaminov and others. Extant archives reveal, according to Oleksa, that Christianity was presented as the fulfillment of what Alaskans already knew rather than as its replacement.⁶²

The Aleuts recognized a "Higher Being" called "Agayup" or "Good Spirit" who provided people with life's necessities. The "Evil Spirit" "Eyak" was harmful and was placated by dancing in his honor rather than by offering sacrifices or praying to idols. The Aleuts also believed in life after death. Veniaminov's discussion with the Koryaks (previously-described) makes reference to Satan, Hell, and life after death, therefore, suggesting that the Koryaks probably had a reasonable understanding of his message.

The Aleuts also believed in a supreme Creator of all things, but ascribed no providential activities to him and offered him no worship. They tended to worship any natural power stronger than themselves, or essential to their survival. For this reason, the sun, moon, and stars were worshipped because the Aleuts feared that their light might become scarce if they were to offend any of these heavenly bodies.⁶³ Aleut folklore also teaches that a wise man once blew upon the water through a straw and created the world. The first place of creation was warm, peaceful, and the people had no needs and lived for a long time. Oleksa points out that the order of creation preserved in certain Alaskan stories parallels segments of the Biblical creation accounts.⁶⁴

The Alaskan world-view was also permeated by a profound awareness of the presence and interpenetration of the spiritual into everyday life. The Sacred was a self-evident reality that could be discerned through communion with spirits, demons, ghosts, and the souls of dead animals.⁶⁵ The Eskimo world-view stressed an indestructible life force that enlivened all animate creatures. In other words, there was a spiritual relationship between people and the world (especially animals) which needed to be maintained and restored by ceremonies and traditional rituals.⁶⁶ Oleksa reports that Alaskans also had a deep appreciation for the beauty and goodness of the natural world.

Orthodox Christianity's emphasis on the importance of the liturgical and sacramental life both affirms and fulfills many aspects of this traditional belief system. Orthodox worship and theology continually stress the manner in which the world and worldly things (ie. water, bread, wine, oil, palms, incense, flowers, wood, paint, etc.) have been sanctified by God chiefly as a result of Christ's incarnation, and now can help people to commune with God more fully. Moreover, the Divine Liturgy's other-worldly aura formed a helpful bridge into Christianity for those Alaskans who adhered to a highly sacralized view of the world.

Mircea Eliade's contention that many religious systems celebrate rituals whose purpose is to connect believers to a pristine time at the beginning, before the world had begun to decline, is evident in many Alaskan rituals which emphasize death/resurrection and which help people to commune with "Those Days" in the present.⁶⁷ Again, the Orthodox liturgical cycle provides a similar role for Christians and hence was probably more accessible to an Alaskan mind-set than other more modernized Christian worship traditions. For instance, the three-fold baptismal immersion as initiation into Christ's death and resurrection, the Divine Liturgy, and especially the Eucharist as participation

in Christ's passion and also as participation in the coming kingdom, and other sacraments enable believers to commune with God more directly and to be transported back in time to the initial salvific works of God. The Orthodox sacramental view of Christian faith and life was accessible to Alaskans, mentally and spiritually, and also provided a fulfillment of their former beliefs.⁶⁸ This was done by preaching Christ and the Holy Spirit as the life force of the world, by attempting to liberate people from the biological determinism which characterized their relationship to the world, and by stressing the manner in which the Eucharist provides spiritual nourishment in a more fulfilling and also liberating manner.⁶⁹

The Russian missionaries also presented the Christian message by building upon and transforming the Alaskan notion of "Sacred Tales." These stories were not written down, but rather, were told to the people by "Kossaks" - tribal professionals or leaders who memorized and retold stories at annual rituals.⁷⁰ Aleuts and others were especially impressed by the historicity of the Christian message and by the fact that God's saving acts had been recorded along with the accomplishments of Christian heroes and saints. While the Alaskan myths "contained the fixed models, the paradigms for appropriate, genuinely human behavior," as lived by various heroes; Christian history was replete with historical figures who manifested appropriate, Christ-like behavior and lifestyles. Oleksa claims that Christianity's historical dimension was influential in persuading many Alaskans who lacked a sense of linear, recorded history. Furthermore, the lives of the saints offered a valuable point of contact with Alaskan sacred stories and thereby facilitated the manner in which the former "replaced" the latter.⁷¹ Old, legendary archetypes and paradigms of behavior were "replaced" by historical figures who lived according to the will of Christ. These last examples reveal that the fulfillment

process does involve a degree of "replacement" as well.

Alaskan religions were also very shamanistic in character. Unlike the Kassaq who was merely a story teller, the shaman was the true religious leader since he existentially knew the spirit and animal realms because he had actually been there. His soul had traveled to these unknown regions, communed with other spirits, and as a result received the power of healing, the ability to invoke blessings and curses, and the power to prophecy.⁷² Naturally, some of the priests were referred to as shamans or kassaqs because of their role as spiritual leaders. Veniaminov did not outrightly discourage these tendencies, but he labored to explain the important differences between the two. Curiously, the shamans appear to have played a major role in preparing the people for the arrival of the missionaries and in encouraging them to receive baptism willingly.

Veniaminov and others suspect that earlier encounters with Russian merchants may have prompted the shamans to concede the inevitability of the Christianization of their people. However, available materials do not provide direct clues as to why these leaders did not try to preserve their authoritative status by encouraging Aleuts to resist baptism.

Reports on other aspects of Alaskan religiosity reveal that the people used to communicate with animals which were believed to be more intelligent, stronger, and faster than humans. These animals allowed themselves to be hunted and killed because they sacrificed themselves in order to feed the helpless people who, in turn, were obligated to respect the animals, observe the ceremonial rites, and obey archetypal standards of protocol. An unsuccessful hunt meant that a relationship between the people and animals needed to be balanced or restored. For instance, someone may have wasted or misused food, a situation which required the animals to withhold themselves from a village until proper apologies had been made.⁷³ Society and the world, were, therefore, construed

as a large family wherein each member played a vital role towards preserving harmony and balance.

Orthodox ecclesiology was presented to the people in reference to family images. The people are brothers and sisters who are nurtured by mother Church and who are under the loving protection of God the Father.⁷⁴ Orthodoxy's liturgical and festal calendar also serves to incorporate the other aspects of the creation into this family structure. Baptism and the blessing of Holy Water were especially prominent features of Orthodox worship for the Aleuts, since they depended upon the water for their survival. As previously indicated, these sacramental celebrations parallel the manner in which Alaskan rites recreate the beginning of time and also restore relationships amongst people and with God.⁷⁵ Parallels between the Orthodox liturgical cycle and the Alaskan view of the strong relationship between people and the world was realized in 1825 by Veniaminov when he celebrated his first Easter. The celebration of Christ's Resurrection coincided with "Kisagunak," which is that time of the year (March) when the people begin to have things to eat again after having depleted their winter supplies. Hence, the theme of resurrection conveniently fit in with the spirit of celebration which accompanied the restoration of food supplies.⁷⁶

Excerpts from Veniaminov's journals and letters offer more insight into how the Gospel was presented to Alaskans and into which elements of the Tradition were emphasized. Most of his visits included the following ministries: preaching (usually with an interpreter), visiting homes and teaching (oftentimes till late at night), baptizing, chrismating those who were already baptized, marrying several couples in one day, conducting group funerals for those who had been buried prior to his visit, hearing confessions, and offering Holy Communion.⁷⁷ During his trip to St. George Island, Fr. John recalls that "in the morning he chrismated 32, in the afternoon he married 11 couples, and in the evening after

vigil he heard 51 confessions" and on the following morning he served Liturgy. ⁷⁸

Much of his preaching seemed to center around the importance of repentance and confession, hence his promotion of the Sacrament of Confession. He also invited non-believers to attend services and ask questions afterwards. He particularly appealed to their understanding of sacrifices, both of the animals and of their own in a harsh climate, to explain Christ's sacrifice and to explain that in and through the Eucharist, a "bloodless sacrifice to the true God, the Creator of Heaven and earth and of all mankind" had been offered. ⁷⁹ Veniaminov's preaching also emphasized God and His relationship to people, monotheism, God as Creator, the Fall, repentance, Christian living (ie. what pleases and displeases God), eternal life, etc. Later visits to the same villages included more detailed presentations of the Gospel. Catechism was also promoted by the availability of various texts which had been translated and which the Alaskans were eventually able to read for themselves.

Available texts do not reveal any significant liturgical reforms or expressions which may have been devised in order to contextualize the worship experience. For instance, well into the 19th century, most of the services were still conducted in Russian and Church Slavonic. References to new rites or traditions are not indicated in available records. Afonsky does note, however, that Petukhov, an iconographer from Sitka, had painted Christ with a traditional face, but dressed as a local Alaskan priest. ⁸⁰ A search for other examples of contextualized worship practices would be beneficial to missiological scholarship pertaining to Alaska.

On the whole, however, it appears that rather than create new liturgical practices, the missionaries presented Orthodoxy as they knew it in Russia, but did emphasize those dimensions which were more accessible to the various Alaskan mind-sets which they encountered. In terms of liturgy, one can perhaps conclude

that the tension between planting and extending the Church was won by the extensionist tendency. Such a result, especially in the early phases of a mission, is most understandable, because the missionaries themselves have only begun to incarnate themselves in the new culture, and "natives" have not begun to assume significant leadership roles yet.

It is very difficult to more precisely monitor the manner in which these two religious systems interacted with one another and produced a new Alaskan Christian faith. Several theological and non-theological factors have been operative in a highly complex manner and extant materials lack many essential details. Veniaminov reflects upon another complicating factor when he asks,

Since all the Aleuts' rules and opinions which I gathered came after almost a century of acquaintance with the Russians, and as most of them are acquainted with the precepts of the Christian faith, are these really their own ideas? Nonetheless, it is pleasing to see in them the ability to adopt. . . 81

Despite such difficulties, this presentation of theological points of contact must be concluded by a discussion of the one point of contact whose influence is more readily ascertained from archives - the example of the missionary as a Christian witness. Veniaminov insisted that coercion, force, and misrepresentation should never be employed; but only God's Truth, difficult labor, patience, and personal example. ⁸² Temptations for the former were great since many Aleuts tended to be submissive, patient people, especially when encountering "superior" Russians. Veniaminov records that when he would ask Aleuts a question, oftentimes their response would be, "I don't know. You know. You Russian." ⁸³

Early clashes between the missionaries and unethical Russian merchants served to reveal the exemplary witness of the monks and to build a trusting relationship between them and the new converts. St. Herman was especially revered

because of his defense of Alaskan women who were taken as concubines, women and children left alone in villages because their husbands had died during treacherous Company hunting expeditions, and of other maltreated people.⁸⁴ His care of orphaned children, his miracles and prophecies (not specified in available texts), and his prayerful monastic lifestyle, not only manifested the power of his Christian witness, but also showed him to be continuous with old traditions, since he was viewed as one who communed with the sacred reality and lived according to its precepts.⁸⁵

The missionary witness was not the only factor in demonstrating the transformative power of life in Christ. Extant missionary reports sent to Bishop Innocent in 1847 conclude that many adult conversions had been occurring because of the witness and example of Alaskan converts and not necessarily because of the preaching.⁸⁶ Veniaminov's Instructions teach that "preaching from the heart in order to reach the heart of others is more important than the content in many instances."⁸⁷ Garrett adds that the witness of children who had attended mission schools and Church schools was also influential in promoting conversions. Veniaminov used examples from nature to illustrate, however, that while personal example is the primary concern of all missionary efforts, one should never forget that the Lord alone is responsible for one's ability to offer a Christ-like witness to others.⁸⁸

CONCLUSIONS

Any attempt to assess the extent to which the Russian missionaries "succeeded" in contextualizing and incarnating Orthodox Christianity in 19th century Alaska yields a multiplicity of conclusions. The application of divergent hermeneutical keys, emphases on different aspects of the missionary effort, a shortage of essential information, and attempts to assess what are oftentimes

intangible objects of study also complicate matters, allow for tentative conclusions, and even for contradictory ones.

This writer has attempted to present both the favorable and unfavorable dimensions of the effort, but must conclude, that overall, the missionaries made considerable progress towards actualizing many of the missiological goals outlined at the beginning of this paper. Such a conclusion becomes more tenable, when one juxtaposes the Alaskan mission to the many Russian missions of previous centuries which lacked a great deal of spiritual focus and guidance.

The incarnational approach to missions is inextricably bound to the ~~question~~ ^{challenge} of helping converts form a new Christian identity that is true to the Gospel, yet also not alien to the ethos and world-view of the believer. Oleksa claims that in Alaska, native and Slavic elements were combined within the framework of Orthodox Christianity to form a new Aleut identity. ⁸⁹ He explains the dynamics of this cultural synthesis in the following manner:

Due to the efforts of these early pioneers in Alaskan education, Native people of several ethnic groups developed a uniquely Alaskan culture and identity. They became the modern Aleut people, a "synthesis" of 3 different Native Alaskan groups and cultures whose "common denominator" is the Christian and Russian influences they accepted and adopted as their own in varying degrees. Aleuts, whether of mixed or Native descent, share a common linguistic and cultural as well as religious background, and represent an authentically Orthodox society in the New World. ⁹⁰

Many would justifiably question whether this particular synthesis is not overly Russified and whether the Russian elements should not have begun to dissipate at an early stage of the young Church's history. Again the tension between planting and extending the Church manifests itself and raises several pressing questions. For instance, is it appropriate for newly synthesized Christian identities (mixtures of the old and new) to be created, especially if the receptor groups are not influential in the decision-making process from the

outset? Secondly, is it possible for the Church to "extend" itself as the organic body of Christ and concurrently to "plant" itself as the same spiritual reality which is now expressed and clothed in unique cultural garments? Thirdly, is it possible to neatly and definitively distinguish the "cultural" dimensions of the Church from the "theological" ones or does this suggest a dichotomy of Church/World that is too extreme and unrealistic?

These questions accompany all evangelistic endeavors and highlight the challenges faced in attempting to contextualize and incarnate the Christian faith amongst new believers. No one can "judge" or "determine" the "success" of a mission, since God alone has such capabilities. However, since Christians are called to continuously purify themselves, both individually and communally, they are also called upon to examine past missionary endeavors in an effort to more clearly ascertain God's will for present and future missions. It is hoped that this paper has appropriately analyzed the favorable and unfavorable elements of the Alaskan mission so that others will be better equipped to faithfully respond to the Great Commission.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Afonsky, Bishop Gregory, A History of the Orthodox Church in Alaska (1794-1917), (Kodiak Alaska: St. Herman's Theological Seminary Press), 1977, 5.
- 2 James J. Stamoolis, Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 1986, 84.
- 3 Ibid., 49-52.
- 4 Ibid., 54.
- 5 Ibid., 63.
- 6 Ion Bria, Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission, (Geneva: World Council of Churches), 1986, 64.
- 7 Stamoolis, 61.
- 8 Ibid., 62.
- 9 Fr. Michael Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Mission: The Alaskan Experience," Lemopoulos, George, editor, Your Will Be Done: Orthodoxy in Mission, (Geneva: World Council of Churches), 1989, 217.
- 10 Stamoolis, 62.
- 11 Lesslie Newbigin, Foolishness to the Greeks, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 1987, 2.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Orthodox Canon Law does permit lay people to perform baptisms in cases of emergency (ie. an unbaptized child is deathly ill) or whenever someone requests baptism and they will not have access to a priest for an extended period of time as was the case in 18th century Alaska.
- 15 Paul D. Garrett, St. Innocent Apostle to America, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), 1979, 79.
- 16 Barbara S. Smith, Orthodoxy and Native Americans: The Alaskan Mission, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), 1980, 9.
- 17 Vsevolod Rochcau, "Innocent Veniaminov and the Russian Mission to Alaska 1820-1840," St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, vol. 15, no. 3, 1971, 117-18.
- 18 Garrett, 109.
- 19 Ibid., 106.
- 20 Ibid., 110.

- 21
Ibid., 91-2.
- 22
Ibid., 101-2
- 23
Ibid., 181-2.
- 24
Ibid.
- 25
Afonsky, 38-9.
- 26
Ibid., 43. Creoles were Alaskans who were the children of a Russian parent and of a Native Alaskan parent. Many of them played a significant role in the growth of the Alaskan Church.
- 27
Afonsky, 63-4.
- 28
Ibid., 76.
- 29
Ibid., 86.
- 30
Smith, 15-16.
- 31
Ibid., 19.
- 32
Afonsky, 73.
- 33
Smith, 17-21.
- 34
Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Mission," 218.
- 35
Pre-Sanctified Holy Communion is prepared by priests on specifically designated occasions and whenever the need arises and is usually used for visitations to hospitals, nursing homes, and private homes, etc. The practice of allowing a lay person to prepare and distribute Communion is unknown to this writer. It would be very interesting to ascertain whether the Canons of the Church allow for this practice, or whether Veniaminov was establishing a precedent. The text does not reveal whether he obtained permission from his bishop in allowing this to happen.
- 36
Smith, 16.
- 37
Michael Oleksa, editor, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, (New York: Paulist Press), 1987, 17.
- 38
Rochcau, 115.
- 39
Afonsky, 42.
- 40
Ibid., 79.
- 41
Rochcau, 113.
- 42
Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, 248.

- 43
Garrett, 50-51.
- 44
Ibid., 68.
- 45
Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Mission," 218.
- 46
Vsevolod Rochcau, "St. Herman of Alaska and the Defense of Alaskan Native Peoples," St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, vol. 16, no. 1, 1972, 29.
- 47
Smith, 24.
- 48
Afonsky, 31.
- 49
Rochcau, "Innocent Veniaminov", 115.
- 50
Afonsky, 48.
- 51
Garrett, 73.
- 52
Ibid., 120-21.
- 53
Michael J. Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Alaska: The Spiritual History of the Kodiak Aleut People," St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, vol. 25, no. 1, 1981, 15.
- 54
Available materials do not describe student life at this seminary or offer any other details which would elucidate the kind of training received by clergy of this time period. Such information would have certainly augmented this section of the paper.
- 55
Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, (New York: Harper & Brothers), 1947, 123-4.
- 56
Ibid., 131-2.
- 57
Ibid.
- 58
Ibid., 296.
- 59
Ibid., 328.
- 60
Ibid., 140.
- 61
Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Alaska," 10.
- 62
Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, 13.
- 63
Garrett, 57.
- 64
Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, 69-70.
- 65
Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Alaska," 5.
- 66
Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, 26.

- 67
Ibid., 13-14.
- 68
Ibid.
- 69
Ibid., 29.
- 70
Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Alaska," 6.
- 71
Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, 13.
- 72
Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Alaska," 7.
- 73
Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, 9-10.
- 74
Ibid., 31.
- 75
Ibid., 13.
- 76
Garrett, 61.
- 77
Ibid., 63.
- 78
Ibid., 75.
- 79
Ibid., 89.
- 80
Afonsky, 64.
- 81
Garrett, 58.
- 82
Afonsky, 67.
- 83
Garrett, 55.
- 84
Rochcau, "St. Herman of Alaska," 34-5.
- 85
Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Alaska," 13.
- 86
Garrett, 200.
- 87
Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, 240.
- 88
Afonsky, 22-3.
- 89
Oleksa, "Orthodoxy in Alaska," 3.
- 90
Ibid., 14.

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